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ABSTRACT

The few remaining fluent speakers of the isleno dialect of Spanish vary their casual pronunciation of /s/ in a manner consistent with, but not identical to, other Caribbean Spanish dialects. The behavior of /s/ in the speech of nonfluent islenos parallels that of fluent speakers, differing only in the higher degree of aspiration and deletion. This variation by isleno semispeakers can be regarded as a type of speech accommodation called 'upward convergence' expressing social integration and identification. Fluent speakers are accorded prestige for preserving the culture's oral traditions, and semispeakers are motivated towards integration and solidarity by varying their pronunciation of /s/ to resemble the perceived behavior of /s/ in the speech of fluent speakers who are identified as prestigious. (Contains 23 references.) (Author)

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/S/ VARIATION AS ACCOMMODATION

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Abstract: The few remaining fluent speakers of the *isleño* dialect of Spanish vary their casual pronunciation of /s/ in a manner consistent with, but not identical to, other Caribbean Spanish dialects. The behavior of /s/ in the speech of nonfluent *isleños* parallels that of fluent speakers, differing only in the higher degree of aspiration and deletion. This variation by *isleño* semispeakers can be regarded as a type of speech accommodation called 'upward convergence' expressing social integration and identification. Fluent speakers are accorded prestige for preserving the culture's oral traditions, and semispeakers are motivated towards integration and solidarity by varying their pronunciation of /s/ to resemble the perceived behavior of /s/ in the speech of fluent speakers who are identified as prestigious.

A well-known sociolinguistic process in American Spanish dialects is the de-occlusion of /s/ in syllable-, word- and utterance-final contexts (Hispanists commonly referred to this as '/s/ aspiration and deletion'). The few remaining fluent speakers of the *isleño* dialect of Spanish, a dying language spoken in a small ethnic enclave in southeast Louisiana, vary their casual pronunciation of /s/ in a manner consistent with, but not identical to, other Caribbean Spanish dialects. Less fluent members of the *isleño* social network also vary their pronunciation of /s/ with more or less success to parallel that of fluent speakers in group conversations.

First, a brief sociolinguistic background of the group is in order. The *isleños* settled in the marshlands of southern Louisiana after they arrived from the Canary Islands (hence their name, *isleños* 'islanders') to the newly-acquired Spanish territory in 1778. They established an isolated community where *isleño* Spanish was the primary language until the 20th century, when public education, military service, and occupational opportunities brought American English to the group. Today there are fewer than 100 speakers of *isleño* Spanish, probably fewer than 20 fluent speakers, with semispeakers and passive bilinguals comprising the rest of the scattered population of 1,000.

Isleño Spanish is characterized by Lipski (1987: 95) as 'a partially fossilized derivative of the speech of Canary Island peasants, with small additions from the speech of Spanish sailors who wandered into the community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.' In addition to /s/ variation, other linguistic features of the dialect include spirantization of /d/ and the 'bidirectional alternation' (Ma and Herasimchuk 1971: 376) of /r l/ (called *trueque de líquidas* 'liquid exchange' by Hispanists). Specifically, the de-occlusion or deletion of /s/ in various contexts is an overt linguistic indicator of *isleño* speech which members of the *isleño* social network recognize as a feature of their language. /s/ plays a prominent role in style-shifting for all *isleños*; this will be demonstrated by the fact that a semispeaker will delete /s/ much more frequently in casual conversations with ingroup members than

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in a dyadic interaction with an outgroup interviewer. The frequency of /s/ deletion of the semispeaker is much higher than that of the Spanish-English balanced bilingual, suggesting a process of speech accommodation.

To compare with Caribbean Spanish, Longmire (1976: 155) states that 'when the consonant /s/ is followed by an unstressed vowel, it is more likely to be deleted than if it is followed by a stressed vowel.' Cedergren (1973: 110) and Poplack (1980: 373) note that in Panamanian Spanish and Puerto Rican Spanish, the deletion rate for inflections is higher than for monomorphemic variables. Puerto Rican Spanish deletes /s/ most frequently in second person singular verb forms, correlated with a high usage of the subject pronoun *tú* (Hochberg 1986, Terrell 1978, Uber 1981). In addition, Ma and Herasimchuk (1971: 389) have stated that the determiner position as the first element in a plural-marked noun phrase is a favorable morphemic environment for /s/ conservation; however, this is by no means categorical (Poplack 1980: 375). Terrell (1982: 51) suggests as a consequence that not morphemic status but redundancy in surface structure is correlated with /s/ deletion: because so many elements of a noun phrase may carry plural marking, its deletion is more likely than a single instance. The redundancy factor will be important later in analyzing the infrequent speech of semispeakers.

The *isleño* dialect of Spanish contains the de-occlusion or deletion of /s/ variably according to the factors previously identified by Cedergren (1973: 46):

> the nature of the following segment;
> the existence of a word boundary;
> the morphemic status of /s/;
> the type of *s* suffix; and
> the grammatical environment of the plural.

Lipski (1990: 22) tabulates the behavior of /s/ in *isleño* Spanish in the phonological environments syllable-finally before a consonant; word-finally before a consonant, a stressed vowel, and an unstressed vowel; and utterance-finally, discovering that deletion is most common word-finally and de-occlusion most common in a consonant cluster. His study encompassed only fluent speakers gleaned from both inside and outside the ethnic enclave, whereas the majority of the population is passively bilingual or less fluent in the dialect. Nonfluent *isleño* Spanish speakers (called 'semispeakers' in Dorian 1977: 30) also vary their pronunciation of /s/, although their decreased competence limits the number of styles they are able to produce along the formality continuum.

If /s/ de-occlusion and deletion remains a marker of the *isleño* dialect, then we would expect all members of the *isleño* social network regardless of proficiency to use this marker more in ingroup interactions (called 'casual style' as a point of reference in the style continuum) than in conversations with outgroup interviewers (called 'interview style'). In order to examine this claim, I first investigated /s/ de-occlusion and deletion in various speech styles along the style continuum of fluent *isleño* speakers and then compared these findings to the corresponding behavior of /s/ in the speech of semispeakers using the categories already defined by Lipski (1990) as important in the behavior of /s/. Campbell and Muntzel (1989: 195) call stylistic shrinkage one of the noncontroversial points of dying languages. The younger speakers of the *isleño* dialect do not (or no longer) possess the

performance style of singing *décimas* (10-stanza ballads) or telling *adivinas* (riddles). These genres of narration require a high level of competence in order to reproduce the forms faithful to the oral history of the group, and only two informants regularly use performance style any more. One informant estimates that at one time there were as many as 200 *isleño décimas* that could be sung by various members of the enclave. Some of the more famous ballads are still sung, but only the oldest informant (age 95) recalls any *adivinas* from the *isleño* oral tradition.

An obvious social factor in the decline of performance style is the opening of the social network. As enclave members lived and worked outside, the opportunities to observe and create *décimas* about group members diminished, in addition to the overall problem of the lessening importance of Spanish. Hence, today's semispeakers possess only a 'restricted code' (Hill 1978: 46) which allows them to participate marginally in informal conversations but not to produce an 'elaborated code' for *décimas*, *adivinas*, or narratives.

I interviewed 15 informants extensively; the data in this particular study are taken from about 50 hours of speech from five balanced bilinguals and two semispeakers. The speakers were recorded in interviews with me and with each other in group discussions in which I only observed. These informants are moderately to highly active in the *isleño* social network. I have to say outright that the social norms of the *isleño* community dictate that in group interactions younger and less fluent speakers attend to older and more fluent speakers rather than actively engaging in conversation. Because semispeakers rarely talk at length in these group interactions, these data will not be statistically robust but will be used to point out certain tendencies.

/h/#C

CC: *No hay* [ɛh'kwela], *no hay...e...iglesia ni hay nada.* [ɛh'tamos] .
en . nohotro que como los indio... Pero no semos indio.
('There weren't schools, there weren't...e...churches or anything.
We were . in . we were like Indians... But we weren't Indians.')

/s/##C

HA: *too mi tía mi* ['tios] *too la familia hablaba ehpañol.*
('All my aunts, my uncles, all the family spoke Spanish.')

Ø ##

LG: *¿La escuela era en inglés o en español?*
('School was in English or in Spanish?')

ER: [na ɛn iŋ'gle]
('Nope, in English')

Example 1. Selected Examples of /s/ Variation in Fluent *isleño* Spanish

/s/#C

JG: *Por un día* [ɛs'taβa] *en la casa de Vigía en la mesa pa comesa...*
('Well, one day I was at Virgie's house at the table to eat...')

/h/##C

DR: [loh] *cabelloh, ¿no? Loh cabelloh*
('Hair, right? Hair')

Ø ##

JG: ¿Cinco ['pweblal?
('Five towns?')

Example 2. Selected Examples of /s/ Variaton in Semispeaker *isleño* Spanish

Table 1 compares the /s/ variation in fluent vs. semispeaker *isleño* Spanish syllable-finally, word-finally, and utterance-finally.

	/s/#C			/s/##C			/s/##	
	[s]	[h]	Ø	[s]	[h]	Ø	[s]	[h] Ø
Interview Style								
Fluent *Isleño*	24	63	13	22	28	50	17	9 74
Semispkr *Isleño*	64	36	0	51	11	37	38	4 58
Casual Style								
Fluent *Isleño*	17	63	20	21	24	55	9	9 82
Semispkr *Isleño*	14	86	0	0	33	67	0	14 86

Table 1. /s/ Variation in *Isleño* Spanish (in %)

In interviews, the two groups differ in /s/ variation: semispeakers retain [s] in all phonological environments, while fluent speakers prefer de-occlusion syllable-finally or deletion word- and utterance-finally. In group conversations in casual style, however, the behavior of /s/ in semispeaker speech parallels that of fluent speakers, differing only in the higher degree of de-occlusion and deletion. Both fluent and semispeakers aspirate /s/ predominantly in syllable-final contexts, and deleted /s/ in word- and utterance-final contexts. While the rates of /s/ variation are not identical for fluent and semispeakers, a pattern emerges: in interviews with the outgroup researcher, the semispeakers retained /s/ more frequently than fluent speakers; but in group conversations the semispeakers aspirated or deleted /s/ more frequently than the fluent speakers. This 'crossover ' pattern is evident. What is the source of this pattern?

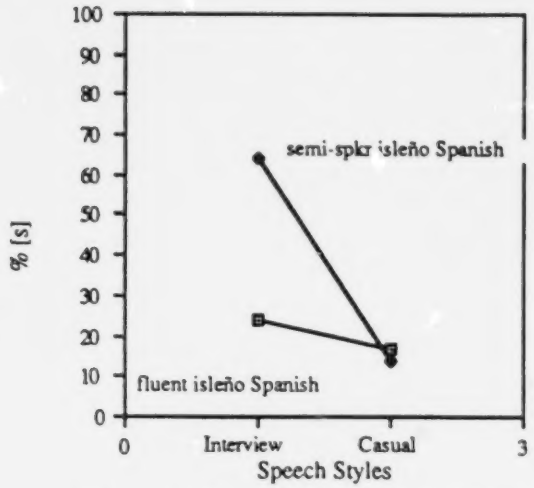

Figure 1. Comparison of [s] Syllable-Finally

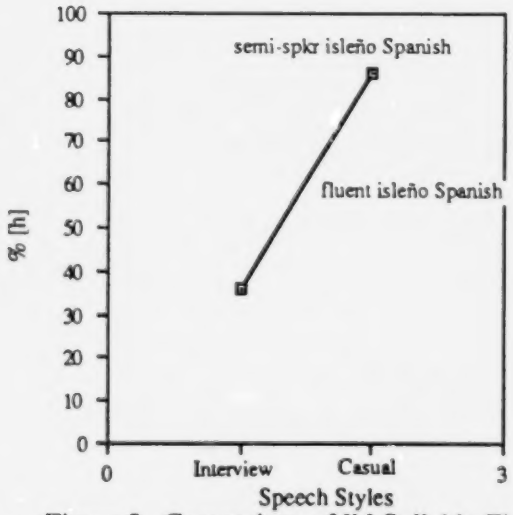

Figure 2. Comparison of [h] Syllable-Finally

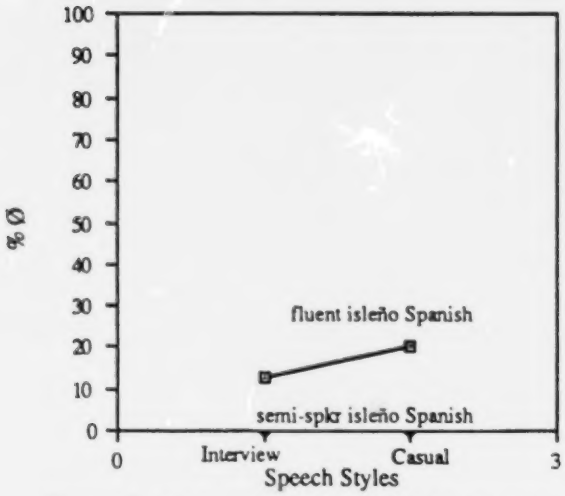

Figure 3. Comparison of Ø Syllable-Finally

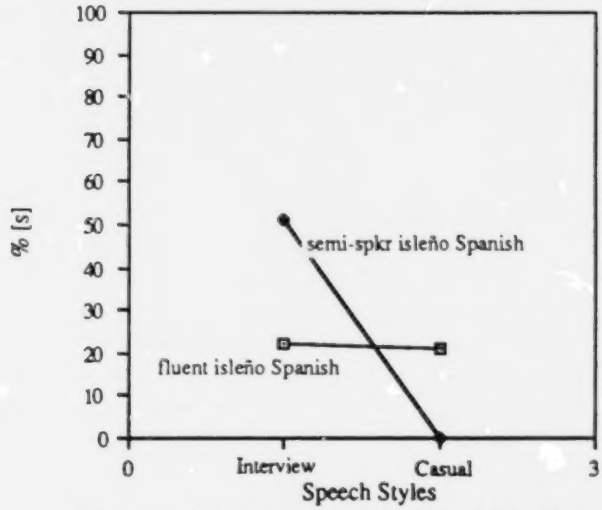

Figure 4. Comparison of [s] Word-Finally

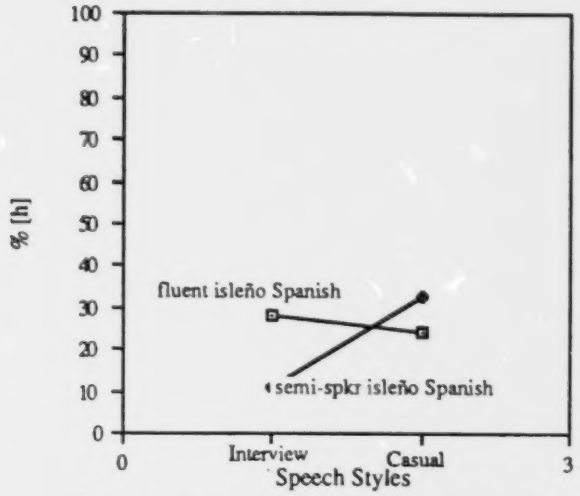

Figure 5. Comparison of [h] Word-Finally

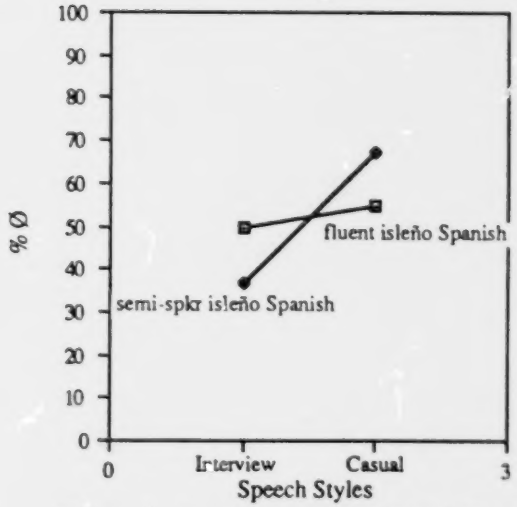

Figure 6. Comparison of Ø Word-Finally

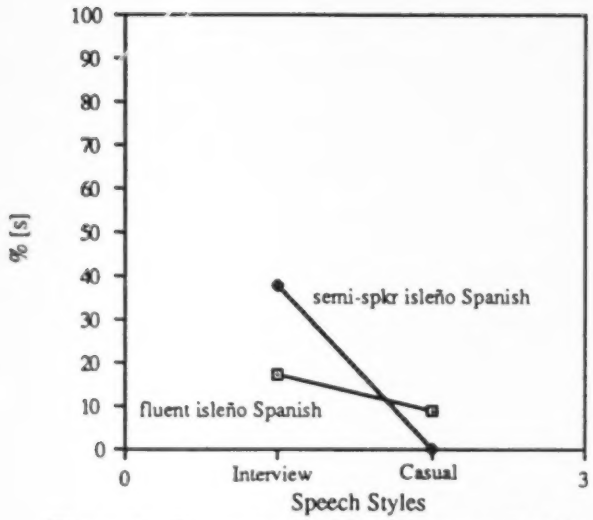

Figure 7. Comparison of [s] Utterance-Finally

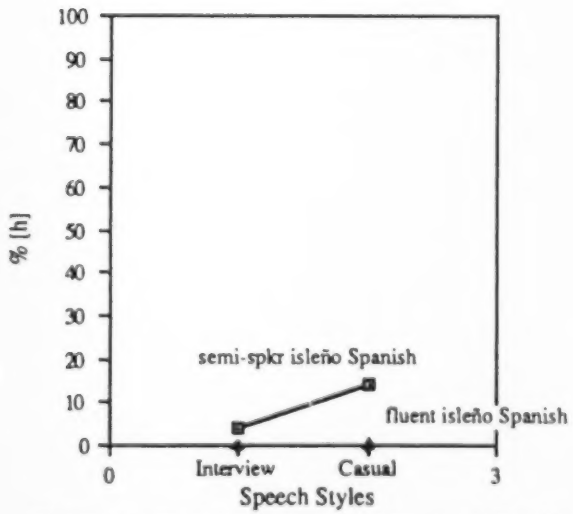

Figure 8. Comparison of [h] Utterance-Finally

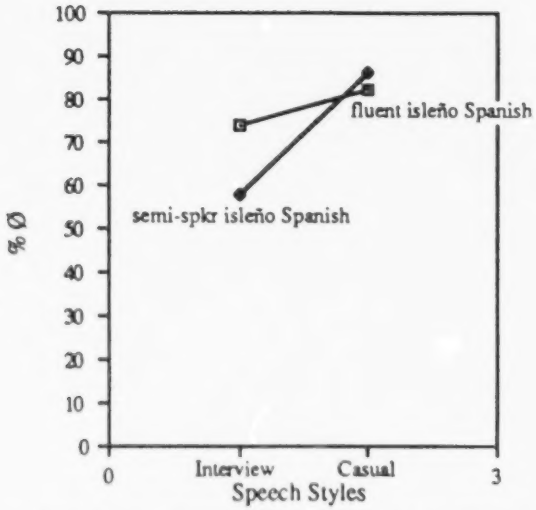

Figure 9. Comparison of Ø Utterance-Finally

Rather than simply being 'wrong' or 'inconsistent', the variation by *isleño* semispeakers can be regarded as a type of speech accommodation called 'upward convergence' (Giles and Powesland 1975: 174) expressing social integration and identification.

Speech accommodation is a model of linguistic variation which focuses on an individual in order to 'note changes in his speech in different settings and situations with different conversants' (Fischer 1958: 54). Giles and Powesland (1975: 155) call this type of research 'the interpersonal aspects of speech diversity.'

The central tenet of speech accommodation is that 'during social interaction, participants are motivated to adjust (or to accommodate) their speech styles as a means of gaining one or more of the following goals: evoking listeners' social approval, attaining communicational efficiency between interactants, and maintaining speakers' positive social identifications' (Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire 1982: 207), broadly categorized by Coupland (1985: 156) as identity marking and interactional management functions. Thus, the rise of /s/ deletion and de-occlusion in both fluent speakers and semispeakers casual speech when within the ethnic enclave may be regarded as a means of expressing social integration and identification. This process is called 'convergence': 'a linguistic strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other's speech by means of a wide range of linguistic features' (Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire 1982: 207). Fluent speakers are accorded prestige for preserving the culture's oral traditions (Hill 1978: 66) and in group interactions control conversational flow and turn-taking. The social norms of the *isleño* community influence less fluent speakers to maintain a more passive interactional role than more fluent speakers, functioning as an audience and chorus to emphasize and echo conversational points. By listening to and repeating fluent *isleño* speech, semispeakers are motivated towards integration and solidarity by

varying their pronunciation of /s/ to resemble the perceived behavior of /s/ in the speech of fluent speakers who are identified as prestigious. This variation is not identical to fluent speakers because semispeakers have limited opportunities in these group conversations in which to maintain or improve their proficiency in the ethnic mother tongue, rendering their competence in /s/ variation imperfect. In contrast, upward convergence does not occur in interviewers with the researcher, who, as an outsider, has no prestige status and whose dialect does not match *isleño* Spanish.

It is likely that while semispeakers may accommodate to the interviewer's speech pattern as part of 'a general tendency for people to converge towards others in many social situations' (Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire 1982: 209), their accommodation is greater in the social network situation with which they identify most strongly. Trudgill (1981: 224) determines that often an interviewer will accommodate more to the informant than vice versa. Says Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire (1982: 210), 'convergence may be best considered as a reflection of an individual's desire for social approval.' From these data we will conclude that in casual style semispeakers accommodate to the group norm more dramatically than to the interviewer in interview style. The semispeakers of this study are politically active *isleños*, along with the balanced bilinguals, and it is entirely likely that they would wish to ally themselves with these other group members in solidarity, and consequently manipulate the variables in their speech which they recognize to be markers of ethnolinguistic identity to be more like that of their social network cohorts. By increasing the percentage of de-occlusion and deletion of /s/ in their speech (the only phonological variable in which this is the case), semispeakers seek to reinforce their solidarity with the group even though their self-reported fluency is limited. Edwards (1985: 152) asserts that convergence 'varies in magnitude according to the extent of the available linguistic repetoire...' In this case, semispeakers are able to manipulate their pronunciation of /s/ to converge with the group norm. Important lexical items like *isla* [ihla] and *pez* [pɛh] are examples of marked items which always carry de-occlusion or deletion.

The pattern of /s/ deletion in semispeaker speech is not simply hypercorrection, because the term hypercorrection implies that the form produced is incorrect. No example has been found of /s/ variants being produced in the wrong environments or in the wrong situations. Therefore, we will not dwell on the notion that semispeaker /s/ variation is a simple case of error.

Several recordings of semispeakers talking among themselves reveal that English is the primary language, but when *isleño* Spanish is used, it is mostly for ethnically-oriented lexical items. Preliminary findings indicate less /s/ variation on the whole than with fluent speakers, reinforcing the notion of upward convergence.

The convergence of semispeakers' speech to that of fluent speakers' speech indicates that /s/ de-occlusion and deletion is a linguistic factor which the *isleños* recognize as a marker of their dialect. 'Since the desire for social approval is assumed to be at the heart of accomodation ' (Giles and Powesland 1975: 159), the semispeakers more often aspirate and delete /s/ when within the social network than when outside.

The fact that variables of /s/ are chosen to represent this desire for ethnic identification stems from the assumption that 'every individual possesses a speech repetoire from which he selects speech forms according to the nature of situational constraint ' (Giles and Powesland 1975: 168). Thus, both willingness and ability enter into accommodation. The salience of /s/ as a productive morpheme may draw attention to its variable use as a linguistic marker (Chambers and Trudgill 1980: 84). Recall Terrell's (1982) notion that redundancy in surface structure correlates with /s/ deletion; semispeakers are able to perceive /s/ variation because of its frequency and can produce some form of /s/ variation with simple linguistic structures. Whereas subtle pronunciation differences are not recognized by informants (Buck 1968: 186), semispeakers of *isleño* Spanish are able to perceive the variation of /s/ in the speech of fluent speakers and vary their pronunciation accordingly. Given their willingness to conform to group norms but their limited proficiency in Spanish, these semispeakers vary /s/ as their only linguistic strategy of speech accommodation in order to gain approval and solidarity with their ethnic group.

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